

# CHECKING UP ON BIGGS.

How the Glad Reunion Came to Bunnykins and Gladys After Years of Separation—Trilby May Takes the Advice of Uncle Nels to Find Out Something About the Help—Biggs Gets a Bump When Sent Out From the Handy Andy shop.

BY SEWELL FORD.

YES, there's a lot more to managing the Handy Andy Shop than just answering phone calls and keeping time on from twenty to thirty near-mechanics who are out on odd jobs. You might think they were a poor lot, these Andys of mine, who are contented to be doing such work when most of 'em might be making half as much again at their regular trades. As a matter of fact, most of them are drifters, for one reason or another.

"No-goods, them," Uncle Nels insists. "Oughta be shut up somewhere and kept at work steady."

"Oh, I don't know," says I. "Maybe they have reasons for changing about. I've seen plenty of jobs I wouldn't want to have hung on me as a life sentence. And then, bosses have a way of handing out blue tickets when work is slack, or production gets ahead of orders. They turn 'em out by the hundreds with no warning. So it's hardly fair to size up every man you find on a park bench as a



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hobo. Maybe he's there because he can't help it.

"Huh?" says Uncle Nels. "They quit you, don't they?"

I had to admit that my force was a shifty one, that some came and went casual.

"But, they are or worse," says he. "You don't know what they've been."

"True," says I. "I seldom look into their past, or ask for a letter from their minister, or demand character references. Do you think that would help in the odd job business?"

"I'd find out something before I took 'em on," says Uncle Nels.

At the time I merely hunched my shoulders and let it ride. He's a naggy old boy, Uncle Nels, and because he got ticked by a smoking room shark for as much as three-fifty on his last trip back from Sweden, he's apt to loop-lamp-eyed at any stranger. But you never can tell when a little hint like that is liable to sneak back into your head.

ANYWAY, it couldn't have been more than a day or so later, as I was puzzling out how to attend to all the work my two bright young college Hicks had drummed up in a ten-block district on the upper West Side, that into the office trickled this human string bean with the rat eyes and the sneery nose.

You get the sneery nose part, don't you? Some noses are like that, especially the long, thin ones. And this had the deep side furrows connecting with the corners of his narrow-gauge mouth. The combination is often seen on head waiters, or ticket agents, or assistant auditors, and other birds who are picked for their jobs, apparently, so they can work out a chronic grouse on mankind. Only this one had decided his upper lip with one of those silly toothbrush mustache effects, and had sort of a hang-dog way of carrying his head on one side with the chin down, which made a curious blend of scorn and humility. Like an imputing beggar holding out his cup and leering at you.

"Need any extra hands, Miss?" he asked, rather whiny.

"If I didn't," says I. "Why should I put the sign out?"

"Oh, well," says he, "you can't always tell. Generally they've just filled the place and forgot to take it in. Don't do any harm to ask, does it?"

"What's your line?" says I.

"Inside wood finishin'," says he. "Wainscotin', mouldin', shelvin' and so on."

"And you were let out last from where?" I goes on.

"Trunk factory," says he. "Been knockin' wardrobes together."

"I see," says I. "Selling those cute drawers that are stuck together with pins and library paste and covered with fancy cretine—that kind that look so neat and solid in June and fall apart in September?"

"Well," says he, squinting at me, "that you women expect for thirty-nine fifty wreckproof steel safes? You want trunk bargains and you get 'em. I didn't invent cardboard bottoms and tin hinges. I just put together the stuff they gave me."

"Until they gave you the run, eh?" says I.

"They didn't give me no run," says he. "I walked out on 'em when they posted that last wage out. And as I'd enough of Rochester anyway I takes a chance on bresin' down to New York."

Every so often I've got to be on the move. I tried to tell Gladys about that. And I did get her to go up to Brooklyn with me, where I'd found another job. She stood it nearly three months, and then she claimed she was homesick. I'd find her with all red, and she'd say she didn't know anybody, and all her friends and relatives were back in

work, all right, and maybe I could stand for the women. I'll give it a try if you say so."

"M-m-m," says I, tapping the end of my chin with a pencil. "I'm not so sure you'd do. Our Handy Andys have to be able to kid the fair sex along more or less, and I judge you're not much of a ladies' man."

"Oh, I don't know about that," says he.

"Never been married, have you?" I asks.

"What makes you think that, Miss?" he comes back.

"Well, for one thing, if you don't mind my saying so," says I, "you're no Apollo Apollinaris. Not with that face."

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I DON'T deny that was rather a tough job, but I didn't care at all for his sneering manner. In fact, he was the most irritating person I'd ever met and I was hoping that this left-hander would send him out with his ears pink. But it didn't. By screwing up one corner of his mouth he produced a smile that would have



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you did most of the drifting. How long since the last Christmas card, Leonard?

"Must be three—no, four years this Christmas," says he.

"How careless of you," says I. "You just naturally stroll off and leave the little wife in the dregs. Is that giving her a square deal? How do you think she feels, waiting there in Taunton, Mass., and wondering if you'll ever show up again?"

"I know it wasn't the right thing," he confesses, tilting his head on one side and looking down that long nose of his. "And I've felt sort of mean over it at times. I expect she's been lonesome a good deal for her Bunnykins."

"Always called me Bunnykins, Gladys did," explains Leonard. "Especially when she'd sit on my knee and smooth down my hair. Affectionate kid. Only nineteen when I married her. She was thirty. But she didn't mind that. Thought I was the greatest man in the country. She'd do 'most anything in the world for me—except leave Taunton. And I suppose she's still hoping maybe I'll get sick of knockin' around some place and come back to her. Tough luck, ain't it?"

"For Gladys?" I asked.

"Course, for her," says Biggs. "I'm all right, ain't I?"

"You seem to lean towards that opinion," says I.

"Well, then," says he, "now you know the whole story, do I get the job?"

"Think you could stay on it five or six months without getting restless?" I asks.

"Oh, I expect I can stand New York that long," says he. "I never make no promises any more; not to women, at least."

"Let me set your mind easy on that point, Leonard," says I. "If you should turn up in Taunton tomorrow, during the next month or so, I'll promise not to break my head giving for you. But just now I can use you. You'll be No. 22 on the books, and if you'll report at 7:30 tomorrow morning I'll try to fit you with a uniform and you can start in."

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HE was right on hand next day, and from the reports I got on him he was a perfect wizard with any kind of wood-working tools. Customers who'd had him for odd jobs thought up new things to have him do and would phone in asking to have him sent up again. He rebuilt a whole set of library book shelves for one lady on Park avenue, and I found I could trust him to do work that none of the other Andys would dare tackle. So it was seldom that Leonard Biggs warmed the bench here in the office.

"Well, then," says I, "I thought he was the perfect specimen in the lot. I wouldn't trust that feller to shingle a henhouse," he remarked once, watching Biggs start to answer a call.

"But he's the one man of them all," I protested. "That's told me the story of his life. I know everything about him."

"Huh?" says Uncle Nels. "It can't be much good."

"Well," says I, "I'm not pinning any medals on him as a consistent husband. He has a wife yearning her heart out in Taunton, Mass., but that doesn't affect his usefulness as a crackjack odd job man. I hope I can keep him all winter."

And it must have been during his third week that Biggs reported back to the shop one night, and instead of shedding his blue denims, washing up and beating it when the others did, he still sat in the corner with his kit of tools at his feet and his chin in his hands. I was about to shut my desk and call it a day when I noticed him there.

"Sick?" I asks.

"No," says he. "I ain't sick."

"Well, what's gone wrong with you?" I insists.

"Oh, nothin' much," he mutters. "But he makes no move to get up, and he looks as if he's been slumped for a doleful-looking object. He seems to have lost that perky air, and the nose lines are deeper than ever."

"Sorry, Biggs," says I, "but it's closing time and if you're set on closing a lodge, you'd better draw around to the undertaker's on the next block. Or was it something you had for lunch?"

"I-I got a bump, Miss Dodge," says he at that.

"From a taxi?" I asks.

He shakes his head. "You remember that last call you sent me out on?" says he.

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"LET'S SEE," says I. "Oh yes. From a duplex apartment up in the West Fifties. Some lady wanted to revise the window seats. Was she snicky about it?"

"Oh, I done the work, all right," says he. "It wasn't much of a job. She did stand around and do a good deal of bossin', and warned me not to leave any marks on the hardwood floor, and made me clean up as I went along. But I didn't mind that. I did it the way she wanted and she gave me a dollar tip when I got through."

"Fair enough," says I. "Was that what shocked you—the tip?"

"No," says he. "It was who she was."

"Eh?" says I.

"You couldn't guess, could you?" he asks.

"Not without a clue," says I.

"Well," says he, letting it out draggily, she—she was Gladys."

"The broken hearted cast-off?" says I.

"Gladys," he repeats.

"But I thought she was a fixture in Taunton?" says I.

"It was her, though," says he.

"That must have been rather a bump for you," says I. "Something of an awkward situation for you both. I should say, I suppose she was a bit surprised, too. What did she have to say for herself?"

"Not much," says Biggs. "She let on not to notice who it was, at first; or maybe she really didn't. The hall was kind of dark where she let me in, and she started telling me what I wanted done. Then we gets out into the light, by the window, and I says, 'Yes, Gladys,' and of course she knows then."

"Did she faint, or anything like that?" I asks.

"Her?" says he. "No. She looks up and says, 'Oh, it's me it is,' and then goes on giving her orders just as if—well, like she would to anybody."

"Good for Gladys," says I. "I couldn't help the cheer. If I had been on the spot I know I should have applauded. 'And then?' I suggests."

"Well," says he, "I didn't say any more. Wasn't nothing for me to say, was there? I got busy and done the job, just as she told me."

"And you didn't ask her how she happened to be in New York, or when she left Taunton?" I demanded.

"No, until she'd finished up," says he. "And she'd asked me the tip, 'Just how did you break the ice,' Biggs," says I.

"Why," says he, "as she was letting me out I says, 'Seems kind of natural, seein' you again, Gladys.' And she says, 'Does it, Leonard?' Then I remarked that she'd got a bump, and she said, 'Well, she's lookin' pretty swell herself. She was, too. Dressed just as stylish and expensive as any woman you'll see on 5th avenue, and her hair done fancy, and long danglin' earrings on. She's a little heavier than she used to be, but she don't look a day older, and she's got a little store."

"That was nice of you," says I. "But go on. Did she call you Bunnykins?"

"No," says he. "She said how she'd got in with a French woman up in Taunton, and they'd opened a shop of their own, and had good luck, and that a couple of years ago they'd come here and rented a little store, and now they'd just hired this duplex apartment to live in."

"So she hadn't divorced you and married again?" I asked.

"She didn't," says Biggs. "But I guess she ain't."

"Then," says I, "your reunion amounted to, was it?" says I.

"Yes," says he. "I left after that."

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"HOW disappointing," says I. "There you had a chance to just look what a dramatic situation you had worked up! An abandoned wife who, instead of pinning away in poverty, becomes rich and prosperous. She sends for an odd job man and he turns out to be the husband who has cast her off. Does she want to get married? Does she treat him with cold scorn? No. She says 'Oh, it's you, is it?' and gives him a dollar tip. But that's real life for you. It seldom gives you the big punch that a play or a movie show never fails to develop. And now I suppose it's all over, eh?"

"I expect it," says Biggs. "I did get a bump, though. But I guess I'll get over it. Might as well be gone over to the boardin' house."

He was taking off his jumper when the phone rang and I answered.

"For you, Biggs," says I. "Someone wants to know if you're still here. Just a moment! Here you are."

"Me?" says he, gazing stupid at the phone.

And I almost had to push the receiver into his hand.

"Yes, it's me," says he. "Who? Oh, I didn't recognize your voice. Yes, I expect I will."

Well, you know how puzzling it is listening to a one-sided telephone conversation. I hadn't an idea what it was all about. But soon he hung up and turned to me with that sneery smile once more in evidence.

"It's Gladys," says he.

"Thought of something more to say to you, has she?" I asked.

"Yes," says he. "Wants me to come back to her."

"What?" says I. "And—will you go?"

# Organized Film Players Make First Complaint to Supreme Arbiter Hays

Gelatin Set Has Various Grievances, Some of Which Will Be Amusing to Disinterested Fans—Demand Greater Respect From Those With Whom They Are Associated—Attaches Have "Needless Insulting Demeanor"—Fight Scenes, Motor Wrecks and Other Similar Events Menace to Lives—Their Labor Stolen by Objectionable Contracts, They Charge.

BY KARL K. KITCHEN.

ALTHOUGH nearly every class of workers seems to have its grievances, it surprised many people the other day when Frank Gilmore, executive secretary of the Actors' Equity Association, complained to Will Hays about the treatment of motion picture actors by their employers. For the popular impression has been that of all workers motion picture players not only are the best paid, but have the easiest jobs. That movie actors have a "class conscience" is well known, but that they had a long list of grievances is something the layman never even dreamed of.

However, their request for reforms is not a mere plea for better working conditions. It is almost a demand, and both Will Hays, who is the supreme arbiter of the motion picture industry, and Jesse Lasky, who is one of the most powerful magnates in the industry, have already put their heads together to see what can be done about it.

Of course, individual motion picture actors have often made complaints about their treatment at the hands of the big producers, but this is the first time that an organized body of film players has put forth its grievances and demanded a better deal.

As the film players are well organized, and especially as the Actors' Equity Association is affiliated with the American Federation of Labor, the movie magnates cannot dismiss these charges with a contemptuous laugh. The film-going public, however, can sit back and laugh—or cry, at the sad predicament of the gelatin set. Some film fans, of course, will probably sympathize deeply with them. But the average layman, unless I am very much mistaken, will get a good chuckle out of their ludicrous tribulations for the grievances of film players have little to do with salaries and untoward working conditions, but a whole lot to do with the mental attitude of their employers.

In fact, the very first grievance that is set forth in the Actors' Equity Association bill of particulars is that producers and directors do not consider business appointments with movie actors as definite business engagements. Film players are often kept waiting for thirty minutes to several hours simply because their employers don't take the seriousness of the attitude of the producers. It seems, as may be summed up in the expression, "What's time to an actor? The gelatin set doesn't like that. They want to be taken seriously, and when Handsome Harold Huckleberry has an appointment with Able Wogleson, or with some other big name, and that even high-priced actors have to wait for thirty minutes to several hours simply because their employers don't take the seriousness of the attitude of the producers. It seems, as may be summed up in the expression, "What's time to an actor? The gelatin set doesn't like that. 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